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sensitivity to potential-differences is practically independent of the size of the instrument. The last model made, with a needle 1.8 cm. long, has a capacity of 9 cm., but this could without difficulty be halved by reducing the size of the instrument; and it might be halved again by omitting one end of the needle and the pair of sectors below it.

Although the sensitivity of the electrometer (with the very efficient optical system used) is theoretically great enough to detect 10^{-6} volt, it has not as yet been made steady enough to detect an isolated potential-difference of less than about 3×10^{-5} volt.

The details of the construction of the instrument and the results of measurements made with it, together with a consideration of the cause of the residual unsteadiness will be discussed in a more extended article to be published shortly.

THE DISTRIBUTION AND FUNCTIONS OF TRIBAL SOCIETIES AMONG THE PLAINS INDIANS: A PRELIMINARY REPORT

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For several years the American Museum of Natural History has been engaged in systematic anthropological field-work among the surviving Indians of the great Plains area in North America pertaining to one definite problem, viz., the distribution and functions of tribal societies. Early observers noted the existence of societies, chiefly for men, which within the tribe seemed to be correlated and in some cases organized into progressive series, or ranks. Some data more or less fragmentary were recorded by Lewis and Clark, Catlin, and Maximilian in early days, and later by Grinnell and J. O. Dorsey. The first serious investigation of such societies was undertaken by A. L. Kroeber among the Arapaho. This was followed by work among the Cheyenne by G. A. Dorsey, among the Assiniboin by R. H. Lowie, and among the Blackfoot by me. These pioneer studies revealed such striking similarities between these four tribal systems of societies as to suggest a case of culture diffusion.

The significance of the problem may appear from the following brief statement; two investigators had previously made special use of what data were then available on these societies in their respective efforts to explain such phenomena as manifestations of a yet to be discovered law of social evolution.¹ In each case the method was the same, one employed by many ethnologists and sociologists; viz., to collect examples of tribal societies from several parts of the world and to theoretically

correlate them to form a consistent development series. The chief weakness of this method lies in the inadequacy of the data; for, so far as I know, the successive tribal organizations for an entire geographical area have never before been the object of detailed investigation. Hence, it is clear that such discussions as we have cited can at best be but hypothetical since the data upon which they are based do not in any way reveal the true characters of the phenomena involved.

Our investigation was planned to face the other way, or to proceed by observation and the collection of concrete data upon all the tribes of a geographical area as a preliminary condition to the interpretation of the phenomena.

The plan of work was developed in 1906 and was to include special investigations among the following tribes: Arikara, Blackfoot, Comanche, Crow, Dakota, Hidatsa, Iowa, Kansas, Kiowa-Apache, Mandan, Pawnee, Plains-Cree, Plains-Ojibway, Ponca, Sarsi, Shoshone, and Ute. The societies of the Arapaho, Gros Ventre, Omaha, Osage, Kiowa, and Cheyenne were excepted because they either had been or were then under investigation by others.

It is clear that an investigation of such magnitude could not be conducted by a single individual but must proceed by the coöperation of several field-workers. Accordingly, the problem was taken up as a departmental investigation conducted by the writer and his associates in the American Museum of Natural History, Dr. P. E. Goddard, Dr. R. H. Lowie, and Mr. Alanson Skinner. The field-work has been completed and the reports upon the several tribes published preparatory to an exhaustive correlation of the data, which will form the final paper to the volume.²

Some of the most important results of this final study may be summarized as follows:

1. It is now clear that the distinction of age found in some tribes, or where only persons of certain ages were eligible to membership, has no functional relation to the organization in which it is found for the very simple reason that in many cases what is obviously the same organization is found among other tribes independent of an age system. (Schurtz's conclusion was that all these societies were natural developments from simple age groups.)

2. The one feature that is almost universal is the exercising of police functions by some one or all of the tribal series of societies, but that the societies are expressions of a social tendency toward control is unlikely because they are often but the secondary or deputy police called upon for special service by permanent officials. In most cases the society is

called only for policing a buffalo hunt and rarely for ordinary services. Again, we have the policing of the buffalo hunt among some tribes by appointed individuals and so independent of a society.

3. Among some tribes these societies are predominately military and based upon military ideals while in others they have serious ceremonial and religious characters. This is well illustrated in the kit-fox society, one of the most widely distributed which among the Teton-Dakota is controlled by military ideals but among the Blackfoot is one of their most sacred organizations.

4. If a general résumé of the characteristics of societies for the different tribes is made, we find their ideals of organization or conceived functions exceedingly variable, much more so than the objective forms of organization, for there is marked uniformity in the number and duties of officers, kinds of regalia, and even in the names of individual societies. It is therefore difficult to consistently interpret these organizations as expressions of any special function in the tribal life, but rather as due to many and various causes.

While the data make it clear that by culture diffusion these societies have been spread from tribe to tribe, it has been diffusion of a desultory kind since in no case has a system of societies been carried along but only separate organizations. We have just noted how the same society appeared in different associations among different tribes. Further, a statistical study of the details of organization reveals a similar condition for it often happens that what is a distinctive feature of a society in one tribe will be found associated with quite a different organization in another. From this it appears that the phenomena can be most readily explained as due to mutual tribal borrowings. We have succeeded in tracing certain features of organization to particular tribes, so it is now clear that no one tribe can be the originator of the society system as a whole.

Whatever may be the ultimate interpretation of the data our work shows clearly that such ethnic phenomena can be made the object of scientific investigation and that very fundamental social problems can be successfully approached by proper inductive methods.

¹ H. Schurtz, *Altersklassen und Männerbünde, eine Darstellung der Grundformen der Gesellschaft*, Berlin, 1902; H. Webster, *Primitive Secret Societies*, New York, 1908.

² *Anthropological Papers*, American Museum of Natural History, volume 9. The descriptive papers are on the Teton-Dakota, Blackfoot, and Pawnee by Clark Wissler; the Eastern Dakota, Crow, Hidatsa-Mandan, Arikara, and Shoshonean tribes by Robert H. Lowie; the Plains-Cree, Plains-Ojibway, Iowa, Kansas, and Ponca by Alanson Skinner; the Sarsi and Kiowa-Apache by Pliny E. Goddard; and the final discussions will be contributed by Lowie and Wissler.